

*Emergency situation.* A natural disaster or system failure that may involve an immediate or imminent threat to public health, safety, or the human environment.

*Environmental Report (ER).* The environmental documentation normally submitted by applicants for proposed actions subject to compliance with §§ 1794.22 through 1794.24. An ER for the Water and Waste Program refers to the environmental review documentation normally included as part of the Preliminary Engineering Report.

*Environmental review.* Any one or all of the levels of environmental analysis described under subpart C of this part.

*Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU).* Level of water or waste service provided to a typical rural residential dwelling.

*Important land resources.* Defined pursuant to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, as important farmland, prime forestland, prime rangeland, wetlands, and floodplains. Copies of this Departmental Regulation are available from USDA, Rural Utilities Service, Washington, DC 20250.

*Loan design.* Document required by 7 CFR part 1737.

*Multiplexing center.* A field site where a telecommunications provider houses a device that combines individual subscriber circuits onto a single system for economical connection with a switching center. The combiner, or "multiplexer," may be mounted on a pole, on a concrete pad, or in a partial or full enclosure such as a shelter, or small building.

*Natural Resource Management Guide.* Inventory of natural resources, land uses, and environmental factors specified by Federal, State, and local authorities as deserving some degree of protection or special consideration. The guide describes the standards or types of protection that apply.

*Preliminary Engineering Report (PER).* Document required by 7 CFR part 1780 for Water and Waste Programs. A PER is prepared by an applicant's engineering consultant documenting a proposed action's preliminary engineering plan and design and the applicable environmental review activities as required in this part. Upon approval by RUS, the

PER, or a portion thereof, shall serve as the RUS environmental document.

*Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition System (SCADA).* Electronic monitoring and control equipment installed at electric substations and switching stations.

*Third party consultant.* A party selected by RUS to prepare the EIS for proposed actions described in § 1794.25 where the applicant initiating the proposal agrees to fund preparation of the document in accordance with the provisions of 7 CFR Part 1789, "Use of Consultants Funded by Borrowers" and Section 759A of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 2204b(b)).

[63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998, as amended at 68 FR 45158, Aug. 1, 2003]

#### § 1794.7 Guidance.

(a) *Electric and Telecommunications Programs.* For further guidance in the preparation of public notices and environmental documents, RUS has prepared a series of program specific guidance bulletins. RUS Bulletin 1794A-600 provides guidance in preparing the ER for proposed actions classified as categorical exclusions (CEs) (§ 1794.22(a)); RUS Bulletin 1794A-601 provides guidance in preparing the ER for proposed actions which require EAs (§ 1794.23(b) and (c)); and RUS Bulletin 1794A-603 provides guidance in conducting scoping for proposed actions classified as requiring an EA with scoping or an EIS. Copies of these bulletins are available upon request by contacting the Rural Utilities Service, Publications Office, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Stop 1522, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-1522.

(b) *Water and waste program.* RUS Bulletin 1794A-602 provides guidance in preparing the ER for proposed actions classified as CEs (§ 1794.22(b)) and EAs (§ 1794.23(b)). A copy of this bulletin is available upon request by contacting the appropriate State Director. State Directors may provide supplemental guidance to meet state and local laws and regulations and to provide for orderly application procedures and efficient service to applicants. State Directors shall obtain the Administrator's approval for all supplements to

RUS Bulletin 1794A-602. Each State Office shall maintain an updated Natural Resource Management Guide and provide applicants with pertinent sections or a copy of the current edition thereof.

[63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998, as amended at 68 FR 45158, Aug. 1, 2003]

**§§ 1794.8-1794.9 [Reserved]**

**Subpart B—Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act**

**§ 1794.10 Applicant responsibilities.**

As described in subpart C of this part, applicants shall prepare the applicable environmental documentation concurrent with a proposed action's engineering, planning, and design activities. RUS shall assist applicants by outlining the types of information required and shall provide guidance and oversight in the development of the documentation. Documentation shall not be considered complete until all public review periods, as applicable, have expired and RUS concurrence, as set forth in the appropriate decision document and associated public notice, has been issued.

**§ 1794.11 Apply NEPA early in the planning process.**

The environmental review process requires early coordination with and involvement of RUS. Applicants should consult with RUS at the earliest stages of planning for any proposal that may require RUS action. For proposed actions that normally require an EIS, applicants shall consult with RUS prior to obtaining the services of an environmental consultant.

**§ 1794.12 Consideration of alternatives.**

In determining what are reasonable alternatives, RUS considers a number of factors. These factors may include, but are not limited to, the proposed action's size and scope, state of the technology, economic considerations, legal and socioeconomic concerns, availability of resources, and the timeframe in which the identified need must be fulfilled.

**§ 1794.13 Public involvement.**

(a) In carrying out its responsibilities under NEPA, RUS shall make diligent efforts to involve the public in the environmental review process through public notices and public hearings and meetings.

(1) All public notices required by this part shall describe the nature, location, and extent of the proposed action and indicate the availability and location of additional information. They shall be published in newspaper(s) of general circulation within the proposed action's area of environmental impact and the county(s) in which the proposed action will take place or such other places as RUS determines.

(2) The number of editions in which the notices should be published will be specified in the Bulletins referenced in § 1794.7 or established on a project-by-project basis. Alternative forms of notice may also be necessary to ensure that residents located in the area affected by the proposed action are notified. The applicant should not publish notices for compliance with this part until so notified by RUS.

(3) A copy of all comments received by the applicant concerning environmental aspects of the proposed action shall be provided to RUS in a timely manner. RUS and applicants shall assess and consider public comments both individually and collectively. Responses to public comments will be appended to the applicable environmental document.

(4) RUS and applicants shall make available to the public those project related environmental documents that RUS determines will enhance public participation in the environmental process. These materials shall be placed in locations convenient for the public as determined by RUS in consultation with applicants. Included with the documentation shall be a list of other project-related information that shall be available for inspection through a designated RUS or applicant contact person.

(5) Public hearings or meetings shall be held at reasonable times and locations concerning environmental aspects of a proposed action in all cases where, in the opinion of RUS, the need for hearings or meetings is indicated in